

The Original Pentecostals

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 May 2005

Preacher: Rod Imberger

[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 15th of May 2005. The preacher is Rob Imberger.

His sermon is entitled The Original Pentecostals and is based on Acts chapter 2 verses 37 to 47. Have you ever noticed how there's some sort of unspoken law about what's appropriate after someone's given a big speech? There's this sort of unwritten code that everyone's just supposed to know, like a manners manual for reacting immediately after a big speech or a presentation.

I don't know about you, but it's always fascinated me. I've always found it so interesting to see what people do after a big speech. I can remember the first time I preached back at my home church. I was just coming to the last sentence in my sermon. I read out the last line. I paused and I went to sit down. And suddenly out of nowhere someone started clapping.

[1 : 09] But not for long. Because she got the look. You know the look. The one that says, stop being inappropriate. That's not the right thing to do.

Somehow everyone else knew what to do. Everyone else knew about this unspoken law. Except my lovely but over-eager fan in the back pew. I'll think of when you're at the footy.

The national anthem is being played. The last line is being sung. No passionate fan just stands there, arms crossed, just nodding with a very stern look on their face.

Often you can't even hear the last line. Because you or someone near you are screaming, Go Bies! As the cheering and clapping erupt around the entire stadium.

For the context, that's an appropriate reaction. But in a very different context, when you're at the MCG and they announce a minute's silence to remember the tsunami victims, don't even think about yelling out.

[2 : 10] Everyone just seems to know what to do. Well, think back to the 60s when President John F. Kennedy was in Germany and he said to the people there, Ich bin ein Berliner.

Which actually means I'm a donut. But what he meant was, I am a citizen of Berlin. I love Germany. I identify with you.

After that speech, there was this outpouring of emotion. Tears were flowing. Because the Germans realised that America was their friend. No one needed to tell the citizens of Berlin how to react.

They just knew. Or in more recent times, think of the Pope's funeral. After the eulogies, there was complete silence. You could hear a pin drop.

The response was prayerful and silent and quiet. For me then, it's no wonder that when I come to Acts 2, verses 37 to 47, I can't wait to see how the crowd reacts to Peter's big speech.

[3 : 18] The crowd has just borne witness to Pentecost, to what sounded like a rush of violent wind, tongues of flaming fire, and hearing one another speak in their native languages. No wonder they're amazed and perplexed, as chapter 2, verse 12 says.

What they need is an explanation. And in response, Peter stands up and preaches the gospel.

What will their reaction be? Will it be feverish at the footy type of applause?

Will it be a hushed silence? Will it be continued scoffing and numerous calls of, Taxi! This guy's had a bit too much to drink. Or, will they throw away the manual for reacting?

Will they be open to Peter's message? What's going to happen? Now that the Spirit has come, now that the Pentecost festival has taken on a whole new meaning, now that the promises of Jesus himself and Joel have been fulfilled, how will they respond?

And will it be the right response? Well, verse 37 says, Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, Brothers, what should we do?

[4 : 33] This is the first step in a right response to the Pentecost event. An anguished plea for truth. Their hearts were pierced. They wanted to know desperately what they should do in response to

what Jesus had done.

Brothers, what should we do? It was an especially desperate question, given that Peter had just accused them, accused the Jews of crucifying the Son of God. So realising their sin, they asked the apostles, what should we do?

Peter said to them, Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit for the promises for you, for your children and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.

And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, Save yourselves from this corrupt generation. So those who welcomed his message were baptised and that day about 3,000 persons were added.

The right Pentecostal question has provoked the right Pentecostal answer. Repent, be baptised, be forgiven your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

[5 : 47] And all of these are characteristic of the Christian, I'm sure you'll agree. But remember, these are the first converts, the original Pentecostals. The call to repent and be baptised, yeah, that was old.

John the Baptist has been doing that for years. But in the name of Jesus Christ, wow, that's new. Receiving the gift of the Spirit, that's unheard of.

So basically, it's a big deal. Here we have the first recorded piece of evangelism. So let's look just briefly at what these Jews were called to do, which is exactly what our evangelistic message should be to our non-Christian friends.

The call goes out repent and be baptised. Peter begins his outreach by calling for repentance and baptism as a sign of that repentance. See, for these devout Jews, this meant there was hope. Even though they had crucified the Son of God and disdained His earthly presence, they still had a chance to be made right with God. Their task was nothing less than a complete change of direction, a change of allegiance, transferring membership from one community that denied Jesus as the Messiah to one that worshipped Him as Messiah.

[7 : 01] Instead of being part of the corrupt generation around them, Peter exhorts these Jews to be part of a new community. And we know that many did do this, about 3,000 that day, it says.

And to show they were serious, they got baptised in the name of Jesus Christ. What a humbling thing to submit yourself to the name which you rejected and scorned only days earlier.

Nevertheless, this was the right response. For us, the command to repent is no different. I've often thought of it as doing a U-turn. Imagine God's up one end and sex or pride or greed or whatever sin takes your fancy is sort of up the other end.

So, as soon as you start moving away from God, you move closer and closer to that sin.

Sometimes you'll be travelling at high speeds, sometimes you'll be cruising along until you repent. You do a U-turn. You change direction and return back to God. For non-Christians, they can be on their private highway for years and years, never seeing the need to do a U-turn.

[8 : 15] For Christians, it's so important to do U-e's all the time, every day. If we're serious about following Jesus with our whole heart, our whole soul, our whole mind and strength, then baptism is a sign of that commitment, a public stance about our faith in Jesus.

Jesus. Well, back to our passage, Peter goes on to say that the Jews, if they do repent and are baptised, they can be assured of two gifts. One, their sins will be forgiven and two, they'll receive the Holy Spirit.

Now, of course, there's no magic going on in baptism. Baptism doesn't equal forgiveness of sins. Remember that in the Bible, baptism is joined with repentance.

So the most natural thing for the believer after repenting of their old life was to show it publicly through the symbolic cleansing waters of baptism.

See, in reality, their sins were forgiven once they repented. In the same way, there's no magic going on in receiving the Holy Spirit. We know the Holy Spirit is joined with repentance.

[9 : 21] Receiving it, it dwells in every believer. There's no formula to have to follow or procedures that have to be undertaken. All that's needed is a repentant faith in Jesus Christ.

This is really important because up to this point in our text, only 120 believers had received the Spirit. Pentecost actually seemed to be an exclusive event. But now, it's clear that the Holy Spirit is promised to everyone.

Read verse 39. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Him.

The Spirit is not reserved for any elitist group or a specific generation or for a limited time only while stocks last. He will invade every believer once they've got faith in Christ.

The promise is no different for us and for our world. So what are we left with? After the speech that brought the house down, how did people react? At the very least, our passage tells it that 3,000 people responded with faith in Jesus Christ.

[10:30] 3,000 people went public and got baptised. 3,000 people received God's Spirit to live in them. 3,000 people. In the space of one day, the body of Christ in Jerusalem multiplied 26 times from 120 believers to 3,120.

I'm sure many of you went to the Festival Victoria with Franklin Graham recently. I think for me, it was the first time that I got a glimpse of what the growth in the early church must have been like. It's hard for us, I think, to conceive of mass conversion. Australia and Australians are so apathetic when it comes to sin and consequences of that. But at Festival Victoria, everywhere I looked, there were thousands upon thousands of people who needed Christ.

And when the call came, thousands upon thousands of people came to the front and received him. Imagine that happening every day and you'll have some idea of the early church.

But of course, we need to remember how this is possible. How is it that the crowd was cut to the heart? How is it that they welcomed his message and were baptised?

[11:44] How is it that that day about 3,000 persons were added? It wasn't just Peter's fancy words. It wasn't even the Jewish guilt about crucifying Jesus.

Rather, the Holy Spirit makes evangelism possible. The Holy Spirit makes repentance possible.

The Holy Spirit makes forgiveness of sins possible.

The Holy Spirit makes faith in Christ possible. This new community was indeed Spirit-filled. They had been amazed by the Spirit-filled Pentecost event.

They had been challenged by Peter's Spirit-filled outreach and evangelism. And they were about to embark on Spirit-filled life together. Or in other words, we should expect to see this significantly impact their life.

We should expect to see the presence and power of the Spirit working in His church. And we're not disappointed because the Spirit-filled church in Acts 2, 42-47 was a witness in four powerful ways.

[12:55] I'm taking this from John Stott's commentary and you'll find them on the wall hopefully. Brilliant. Firstly, it was a learning church. Look at verses 42-43.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. So isn't it interesting that the first proof of the Spirit's presence and power in the Spirit-filled church is that they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching.

The Spirit is the Spirit of truth. These new believers were not being thrust into a mystical or anti-intellectual faith experience. The Spirit who had made them believers is a teacher.

He uses his servants like the apostles to impart truth. And good thing, too. They were hungry for it. They had devoted to Spirit-filled teaching. And they could be confident in the apostles' authority that their teaching was authenticated by wonders and signs in verse 43.

It's an important lesson here for our contemporary church. If we're the sort of believers that call ourselves Spirit-filled, then we must be committed to the Spirit's words of truth, that is, the Bible.

[14:16] We must be wary of churches that claim to offer a Spirit-filled experience that is, in reality, uninformed or ungoverned by Scripture.

A truly Spirit-filled church is a learning church. Secondly, the Acts 2 church was a loving church. verses 44 and 45 make this clear.

All who believed were together and had all things in common. They would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Their fellowship was celebrated in their giving as well as their receiving.

And what they received was God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. What they gave were their goods and wealth. And this Spirit-filled church knew what it was to show Christian love, real and sacrificial. It was a church where the poor knew no shame and the rich knew no pride, as one writer has said. Such was the spirit of generosity. The possessions would be sold and the money distributed to anyone as they had need.

[15 : 28] No priority system, no center-link office, no distinction between low and middle income earners, just a loving church. But should we do this?

That's where push comes to shove, I think. I mean, I have a problem with letting my girlfriend drive my Holden V6 Commodore Berline. It's not that I think she's an unsafe driver. It's not even that I think my car is an idol, though she might disagree.

But somehow I still have a problem sharing that gift with a sister in Christ. So the idea of selling it to benefit other brothers and sisters in Christ, oh dear, that's a bit unreasonable.

What would be unreasonable for you to sell? And not to sell, but to give away the profits, so what you're actually end up with is loss. Well, it seems to me we have to be a little careful here.

God is not opposed to Christians owning private property. the fact that in Acts 2 46 believers broke bread in their homes means at least some of them had not sold their homes, but they most certainly would have voluntarily been self-sacrificial in some other way.

[16 : 44] The original Greek makes it plain that this selling and sharing of goods and wealth was voluntary for occasional and for specific needs, not once for all.

What's important is not that we have a massive once-in-a-lifetime garage sale on ourselves, giving away everything because that's what the early church did. No, what's important is that our spirit-filled loving church really is loving.

The fact that we have thousands and thousands of destitute brothers and sisters in Christ should be challenged enough for us. It's part of our responsibility as spirit-filled believers to care for other spirit-filled believers as they have need and they do have need.

Thirdly, the spirit-filled church was a worshipping church. Verses 42 and 46. They devoted themselves to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts. They worshipped Christ by formally partaking in his supper, by the breaking of bread in the temple.

[18 : 03] But they also worshipped Christ informally, breaking bread at home, eating with glad and generous hearts. They worshipped Christ in hearing his word proclaimed through the apostles' teaching.

And they worshipped Christ by praying to him devotedly together. Above all, their worship was characterised by joy. Everything they did was with glad and generous hearts.

What a warning this is. To any of us who think that worship can be dull, we have plenty of reasons to be joyful. Every worship service should celebrate the mighty acts of God through Jesus Christ.

And this doesn't mean turning into a happy, clappy, feel-good church. church. It's about rediscovering the joy of being filled with the spirit of truth, the spirit of power, the spirit of Christ, who has made us believers and who sustains us as believers.

Let's then be a worshipping church. Fourthly and finally, the Acts 2 church was an evangelistic church. Look at verse 47.

[19 : 11] Day by day they praised God, having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

They could be the most learning, loving, worshipping community there was. But if it did not direct outward, this church would be inauthentic. Sure, devoted Bible study, devoted worship, devoted fellowship, it's made for a very good inner circle experience.

But what about their witness? It's a question that's just as relevant today. In our church, do we simply maintain a well-oiled, well-fed group of comfortable Christians?

Or do we have a heart for God's mission that puts all of our inner circle stuff into the right perspective? We'd be more obedient by following the biblical example where the believers praised God and the Lord added daily to their number, those who were being saved.

It's important to see here that there's no official evangelism program, no ten-week course about how to share your faith. Rather, it's the Lord's role to add to their number those who were being saved.

[20 : 27] Now, no doubt, he did this through the learning, loving, worshipping community. But the point is, he did it. The true spirit-filled church will acknowledge that their praise and proclamation of God is a witness to others of the spirit who is at work among them.

But more importantly, the true spirit-filled church will place the sovereign responsibility of converting people into God's hands. A spirit-filled church is an evangelistic church.

Well, people sometimes say that the problem with the church is the people. I often feel the same when I've had a busy day at work. I start thinking it would be a lot easier if there weren't any customers.

I mean, who needs them? Often we're left wondering why we can't be more like these believers in Acts 2. We often say this despairingly.

I want to close tonight by encouraging us. There's no despair. There's no... In this passage, there's truth. This Holy Spirit, this passage is not an occasion for despair, but for joy.

[21 : 37] We don't need to wait for the spirit to come. We don't need to wait for the spirit to be poured out in a new and improved way. We don't even need to return to early church practice and imitate exactly what they did.

What we need to do is understand that the Holy Spirit did come on the day of Pentecost, and he has never left his church. The spirit who invaded into repentant hearts, who cultivated a learning, loving, worshipping, evangelistic community, is the same spirit dwelling in and amongst us now.

So let us be the spirit-filled church. Let's pray. Dear Lord, we praise you for sending your spirit all those years ago to give birth to the church of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We praise you for the legacy that it has even now, that we are here because of their witness. Lord, we pray that we would hear Peter's message and you repent, to be baptised, and we will receive the forgiveness of sins in your spirit.

Lord, help us proclaim that to those who do not know you. And so, Lord, grow your church here on earth. Grow it into the loving, learning, worshipping, and evangelistic community we are called to be.

[23 : 09] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.